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041544Z Jan 06

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 000037

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SECSTATE FOR NEA/ARN, NEA/P, NEA/PPD, NEA/AIA,
INR/NESA, R/MR, NEA/IPA, I/GNEA, B/BXN, B/BRN

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION 12/19/2005-01/04/2006

1. Summary: Jordanian press in the last ten days has focused on regional issues, specifically the run-up to the Palestinian elections, Iraq's government formation process, and statements by former Syrian Vice President Abdul Halim Khaddam. Editorial commentary follows. End summary.

2. Mideast: PA Governance and Stability

Oraib Al-Rantawi wrote in the center-left, influential, pro-Palestinian Arabic daily Al-Dustour on December 27: "Israel, which has not stopped for a moment its campaign of assassination, liquidation, and raids all over the Occupied Territories, wants a weak Palestinian leadership that has no credibility among its people, so it can claim that there is no reliable Palestinian counterpart in the peace process, and that there is no alternative to a unilaterally-imposed solution. The result, though Israel is not solely responsible for it, is that the PNA is now in a state of collapse and its authority is not more than that of a medium-sized faction. Consequently Palestinians now dwell under a masked occupation that rules them as well as their authority. The moment may not be far when Palestinian consciousness awakens to the realization of the threats they face, of annexation and expropriation of their land and annulment of their rights. The realization that freedom from occupation may dictate dispensing with an authority that has no power or authority, and no function except maintaining the illusion of statehood and independence."

Jamil Al-Nimri wrote in the independent, centrist, widely circulated Arabic daily Al-Ghad on January 4: "Postponing the elections would entangle the Palestinians in an inner stalemate characterized by lack of achievement and corrosion from within. This is probably what Israel wants if Israeli reports are true about Sharon's intent to throw out the road map once and for all after the Israeli elections are held and his plan for an alternative settlement plan, which he will negotiate with the Americans and not with the Palestinians, who are drowning in chaos and are unable to rule themselves and control their decisions." Al-Nimri adds: "Sharon's sources have denied those reports and Saeb Ureikat expressed his doubts that such a plan, if it exists, will receive any support. However, the failure of Palestinian elections will render this plan the only way out and a reality."

3. Iraq: Reconstruction; Formation of a Government

Taher Al-Adwan, Chief Editor of the independent, populist, opposition Arabic daily Al-Arab Al-Yawm wrote on December 27: "We live in a peculiar time with hordes of political entities raising religious slogans and others promoting freedom and democracy through the intervention of foreign powers to occupy one Arab country or another, and with American and British officials touring the Arab world to inspect the armies and gunboats. Important changes have happened since the U.S. and Britain declared the Arab world a war zone. Therefore we suggest, as a favor to us, that these two countries should establish a ministry of colonies each, so that the people of the region would realize that the neo-colonial governments are willing to bear their security and economic responsibilities towards the people whom they subjugate, which may induce them to implement the Geneva Convention and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in the region, and end the state of confusion over the defunct Arab order."

Al-Adwan, responding on January 4 to an op-ed piece by Ambassador David Hale, wrote: "The publication of the op-ed piece by the Ambassador is most welcome for two reasons: The first is that we are better off hearing the U.S. point of view directly from U.S. officials rather than Iraqi journalists who are paid by the Pentagon. The other reason is that it sets an example

in diplomatic and political action in a region where obscurity and silence are the rules.. [Nevertheless], to say that the Iraqi elections were a 'landmark in the history of freedom' as President Bush described them, or a 'step forward' as the Ambassador described them, is surprising, because the truth is altogether different. Iraq at present is rife with heinous crimes, many of which are committed by terrorists, but most of them are committed by the occupation, under pretext of the conditions that the occupation created. What happened and is happening at the hands of the U.S. is several steps backwards, to the age of religious wars. It has had negative consequences for the whole region, notably Jordan, whose neighbor changed from an exporter of oil to an exporter of terror."

14. Mideast: Syria

Nahed Hattar wrote in Al-Arab Al-Yawm on January 1: "The virtual suicide of former Minister of Interior Ghazi Kan'an, and the political and moral suicide of Khaddam, have eliminated any credibility of the Syrian regime, which should now review its strategic calculus. Khaddam and other Khaddams hiding with in the regime are the source of danger to Syria, not the Syrian nationalist intellectuals. I wait impatiently for the day when President Assad responds to Khaddam by dismantling the links of cronyism, the repression, and the corruption in the regime, releases all political prisoners, and holds free and fair elections that produce a democratic government."

Former Minister of Administrative Development Bassam Al-Umouh wrote in the leading, semi-official Arabic daily Al-Rai on January 1: "Listening to Abdul Halim Khaddam, it was refreshing to hear the emphasis on freedom, democracy, and human rights, all of which we missed in his discourses ten years ago, when these slogans did not save the prisoners, widows and orphans, and those made homeless. The old logic of Khaddam contradicts his present one. It is incomprehensible that the human rights of the Lebanese should be of such importance to him, while those of the Syrians have always been meaningless."

Hale